

Raidermania

South Point throngs mass to cheer returning heroes

By TOM KNAPPENBERGER
Gazette Staff Reporter

team bus to the high school, sirens wailing and horns tooting in an unprecedented outpouring of community pride.

This is the South Point area's proudest hour.

Friday night, South Point's Red Raider football team completed a perfect 14-0 season when they ripped Ahoskie for the state 3-A high school football championship, 34-13.

"This is great, just the greatest

thing that ever happened here," echoed fan after fan.

"You'd have to go back years to find anything like this, and you probably couldn't," grinned a tired but happy South Point County Commissioner Harley Gaston Jr., a red rag dangling from his slack's pocket.

Gaston along with many in the crowd had just returned from Ahoskie, a six-hour drive.

Belmont Mayor Billy Joye Jr. came

back with the cheerleaders and other early-bird fans, arriving at 4 in the morning. He agreed Belmont had never seen anything like the outpouring of support for the Red Raiders.

"South Point football has brought this town together like Khomeini's brought the country together," Joye laughed.

As the 3 p.m. hour of the team's arrival approached, the anticipation

grew among the ecstatic crowd packing Belmont Abbey Plaza. All eyes strained northward toward the hilltop where Belmont police, blue lights flashing, waited to escort the team bus when it exited I-85.

Red and black were the colors of the day: Jackets, banners, ribbons, crepe paper, ball caps — all signaled a common identity with the team which was bringing home a state championship.

Some even sported red and black T-shirts proudly proclaiming, "South Point Red Raiders — State AAA Champs 1979." If they were made up ahead of time, they were more accurate than the bumper stickers passed out in Ahoskie congratulating the Cougars on winning the 3-A title.

At 3:22 p.m., police announced that the Raider bus was crossing the Catawba. A few minutes later, the crowd exploded as the Silver Eagle cleared the horizon and pulled into a swarm of cheering fans. Coaches and police kept players on the bus so a planned parade through Belmont could proceed. Families and friends shook hands with the players as they leaned from bus windows.

Cars festooned with hastily drawn "We're No. 1" posters trailing red and black ribbons followed the bus through Belmont as three police cars, sirens screaming, blocked traffic on Wilkinson Boulevard and escorted the parade to South Point High.

Along Main Street, passersby waved with their forefingers in the oft-repeated No. 1 symbol. Reader boards on local banks and restaurants congratulated the returning winners. On South Point Road, an elderly lady stood in her front yard, waving a red towel with both hands.

Everyone, it seemed, wanted to be a part of the act.

"The whole community that feeds South Point — McDenville, Cramerton the South New Hope Road area — they're all proud as can be, too," said one fan of the team's success.

"The town didn't let the team down

and the team didn't let the town down," smiled South Point teacher Sharon Traywick whose T-shirt proclaimed "I'm a teaching Raider." "I think the community support overwhelmed them (Ahoskie) and gave our boys spirit."

South Point fans, fresh from Friday's victory, claimed no bias as they reported "at least 3,000" supporters in Ahoskie's 5,000-seat stadium. Large contingents of Raider fanatics have followed their team more than 1,000 miles in three playoff games; from the southwestern mountain of Tuscola to Lenoir and then 300 miles to Ahoskie, in the northeastern reaches of the state.

"I had no idea there would be this kind of turnout," smiled Coach Jim Biggerstaff, shaking a weary head. "They (the team) kept me up all night and I kept them up all day."

Shy South Point star Jeff Williams took the spotlight long enough to tape a giant red number "1" to the fieldhouse door.

Other players kissed girl friends while fans hugged coaches and parents shook hands and slapped each other on the back.

Mayor Joye has tentatively scheduled a parade through Belmont Tuesday at 2 p.m. Watch Monday's *Gazette* for more details.

Joye, who had bet Ahoskie Mayor Merrill Evans two dozen stockings against a 10-pound bag of shelled peanuts, came back without his winnings, but promised to call his counterpart Monday.

And *The Gazette's* empty stocking fund will be \$50 fuller when the Ahoskie *News-Herald* publisher pays off a game bet he made with *Gazette* publisher Johnathan Segal.

Joye said he's considering enshrining his peanut prize in City Hall's trophy case, a lasting memento to a day and a team South Point fans will long remember.

One fan told Joye not to sweat the nuts: "Tell them to keep the peanuts, we got what we wanted. They grow peanuts. We grow football players."



Gazette photo by Seny Norasingh

RAIDERMANIA — More than 1,000 happy fans, most wearing the red and black Raider regalia, mobbed the chartered bus bearing South Point High's triumphant football team when it arrived in Belmont Saturday afternoon. Joyous supporters then followed the team in a

gigantic motorcade through the streets of Belmont to a homecoming at South Point High. The Red Raiders brought home South Point's first state football crown by overwhelming eastern champ Ahoskie 34-13 Friday night in Ahoskie.

THE GASTONIA GAZETTE

back page

12-A— Sunday, Dec. 9, 1979

The things you see